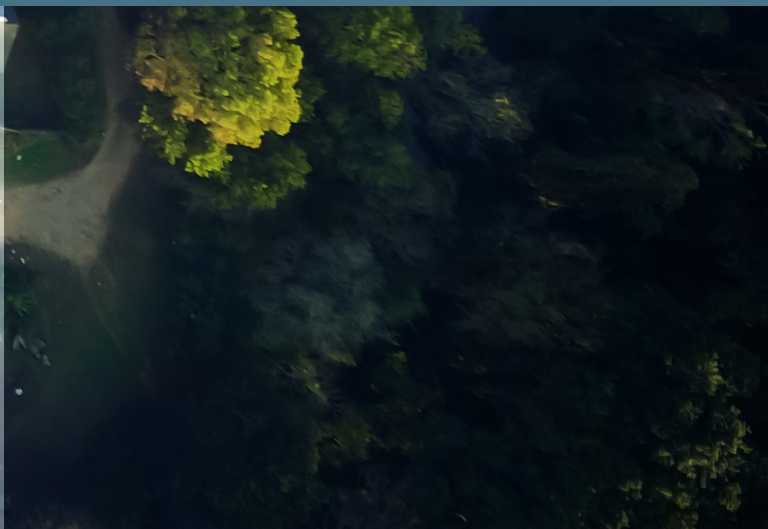


# Tackling Vacancy and Abandonment: Strategies and Impacts after the Great Recession



This article is excerpted from *Tackling Vacancy and Abandonment: Strategies and Impacts after the Great Recession*, a new edited volume from the **Center for Community Progress** and the **Federal Reserve Banks of Atlanta and Cleveland**.

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# Resident Engagement in Vacant Lot Greening: Empowering Communities for Neighborhood Revitalization

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## Introduction

Approximately 15 percent of U.S. cities consist of vacant land, or more than 9 million acres (Bowman et al., 2004). Vacant land is especially prevalent in shrinking cities with an industrial past, declining populations, and limited tax bases (Lee, Newman, and Park, 2018). To complicate the issue, vacant land is often abandoned by its legal owner, resulting in a pattern of disinvestment and a lack of regular maintenance. Vacant lots, when left unmaintained, become liabilities for communities and may give rise to consequences such as crime, including violence (Branas, Rubin, and Guo, 2013), dumping, and creating unsightly conditions (Garvin et al., 2012). Lots with overgrowth, dumping, and other signs of deterioration discourage positive social interaction (Garvin et al., 2012) and have adverse effects on the physical and mental health of residents (Augustin et al., 2008; Cohen et al., 2003).

Major federal investments in the demolition of vacant structures in recent years, including the Hardest Hit Program, have resulted in a growing supply of vacant lots in communities across the country (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2019). A 2019 national survey of greening and land management organizations, such as land bank authorities and nonprofit service providers, found that, on average, vacant lots now make up 75 percent of vacant property inventories (O’Keefe et al., 2020). The dominance of vacant lots in America’s vacant property landscape is expected to continue, as nearly two-thirds of

organizations surveyed reported that their vacant lot inventories had increased over the past two years (O’Keefe et al., 2020). Meanwhile, funding for vacant lot greening and maintenance has not increased and has even declined for more than 20 percent of public organizations such as government agencies, land bank authorities, and redevelopment corporations (O’Keefe et al., 2020).

In the community development sector, fewer resources, less scholarship, and less attention have been devoted to the effective management of vacant lots than to vacant

structures, despite their shared negative effects (O’Keefe et al., 2020). Addressing the strategic management of vacant lots often falls to the bottom of a long list of organizational priorities. Yet, as is the case with structures, effective management of vacant lots requires planning, investment, collaboration, and best practice approaches. Without such management, vacant lots become a public health burden in communities, contributing to a variety of negative social, ecological, and economic impacts.

In contrast, when the management of vacant lots is effectively addressed at scale through greening programs, these lots can deliver diverse public health benefits to communities. Greening programs support the systematic upkeep of vacant lots and may include activities such as obtaining professional mowing services or engaging residents to purchase and maintain side lots, mow community lots, plant gardens, or create pocket parks (Beauregard, 2012; Schilling and Logan, 2008). Greening not only remediates physical conditions, it can also add value by repurposing lots in ways that benefit communities, often in ways not previously considered. Because of its connection to many critical development and ecological issues, vacant land maintenance and greening have the potential to be catalysts for many broader community development and regeneration efforts (Kim, 2016). Greened lots can address environmental challenges (for example, green infrastructure), increase opportunities for recreation (for example, parks and trail systems), improve access to food (for example, urban agriculture), and restore community vitality and pride (for example, murals, pop-up restaurants) (Carlet, Schilling, and Heckert, 2017; De Sousa, 2014; Németh and Langhorst, 2014). Greening can reduce crime and violence (Heinze et al., 2018), improve community health outcomes (Branas et al., 2011; South et al., 2015), and rebuild social and economic value in neighborhoods (Alaimo, Reischl, and Allen, 2010; Garvin et al., 2012; Heckert and Menis, 2012). (See figures 1 and 2.)

To capitalize on these benefits for the expanding vacant lot inventories in low resource settings, communities require strategies that maximize program responsiveness, capacity, and sustainability. Resident engagement in greening is one such approach.

### **Importance of Resident Engagement in Vacant Lot Greening**

Resident engagement in vacant lot greening may safeguard and benefit communities while advancing the capacity and sustainability of greening programs. Residents are most affected by vacancies in their neighborhoods, and the future of vacant lots will most immediately affect their lives. Ensuring that residents’ priorities for revitalizing their neighborhoods are respected

is therefore a foremost ethical concern. Historically, the voices and priorities of residents have often been marginalized in the name of community improvement (Arnstein, 1969; Giloth, 2018). Prioritizing residents’ concerns is vital to preventing the types of exclusionary practices and policies that have led to the displacement of low-income and minority residents (Fullilove, 2004; Lopez, 2009). In addition to preventing these types of historical abuses, strategies that amplify and prioritize the voices of residents can help ensure that greening programs build value for all community members (Lowe and Thaden, 2016).

Residents’ involvement in implementing and planning greening efforts may also be important for advancing program capacity and sustainability. Involvement can improve program responsiveness by building on residents’ local knowledge and existing community relationships. This engagement can help generate strategies that are locally relevant and more acceptable to communities (Faga, 2006; Garvin et al., 2012; Schilling and Logan, 2008), including those that are identified and led by residents. Residents’ involvement may also expand program capacity by enabling more lots to be greened more affordably through shared stewardship (Heinze et al., 2018). As participants in planning and developing programs, residents can increase the legitimacy of programs, support their use, and help to sustain them (Rémillard-Boilard, Buffel, and Phillipson, 2017).




### **Current status of resident engagement in greening and the engagement continuum**

Many scholars and practitioners view resident engagement as essential to community development and revitalization (Arnstein, 1969; Lowe and Thaden, 2016; Carlet, Schilling, and Heckert, 2017; Wright and Reames, 2020). Requirements for engaging residents are common in grant guidelines and in the mission statements and bylaws of organizations ranging from land bank authorities to neighborhood associations (Alexander and Toering, 2013; City of Detroit, 2020; HUD Exchange, 2020; New York State, 2020; Olens, 2014). Yet, engaging residents also incurs time and resource costs that may deter program managers from prioritizing engagement in their work (Moynihan, 2016). As a result, the depth and quality of residents’ engagement in community development work such as vacant lot greening are inconsistent and wide ranging (Moynihan, 2016; Barnes and Mann, 2010; Heikkila and Isett, 2007; Giloth, 2018).

Resident engagement practices fall along a continuum, with increasing levels of resident participation and influence in decision-making. Each form of engagement offers different benefits to organizations and communities (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Resident Engagement Continuum: Examples of Practices and Related Benefits

	 <b>Communication</b>	 <b>Input</b>	 <b>Involvement</b>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Annual reports</li> <li>• Website and social media</li> <li>• Flyers</li> <li>• Door knocking</li> <li>• Speaking at local meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Town hall meetings</li> <li>• Hosting listening events</li> <li>• Speaking with community based organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood greening events</li> <li>• Technical support</li> <li>• Hosting neighborhood trainings</li> <li>• Supplying tools and resources to residents</li> </ul>
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase transparency</li> <li>• Build awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify resident priorities</li> <li>• Create responsive programming</li> <li>• Increase buy-in</li> <li>• Build trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build and leverage local capacity</li> <li>• Sustain investment long-term</li> <li>• Expand resident influence</li> </ul>

At the most foundational level, organizations communicate with residents to keep them informed about agency activities and decisions (International Association for Public Participation, 2018; Schilling and Logan, 2008). Informed residents may be more likely to seek additional ways to become involved. At the next level, organizations gather resident input through channels such as surveys and town hall meetings to guide their work (International Association for Public Participation, 2018). Soliciting input helps organizations align their plans with community needs and priorities, improve decision-making, and promote wider acceptance of greening plans and programs (Faga, 2006; Garvin et al., 2012; Schilling and Logan, 2008). Soliciting input can begin to build trust when the input is clearly addressed in the final outcomes of plans and decisions (International Association for Public Participation, 2018). At more intensive levels of engagement, organizations involve residents directly in planning and implementing greening programs (International Association for Public Participation, 2018), thereby tapping into residents’ skills and talents that can benefit organizational capacity and the quality of service delivery. Involving residents in decision-making capitalizes on their local knowledge to design more responsive, equitable, and sustainable programs (Rémillard-Boilard, Buffel, and Phillipson, 2017; White, 1996). Benefits may expand when organizations use multiple forms of engagement and involve residents in ways that support them to define and implement greening in their communities (Lowe and Thaden, 2016; Arnstein, 1969).

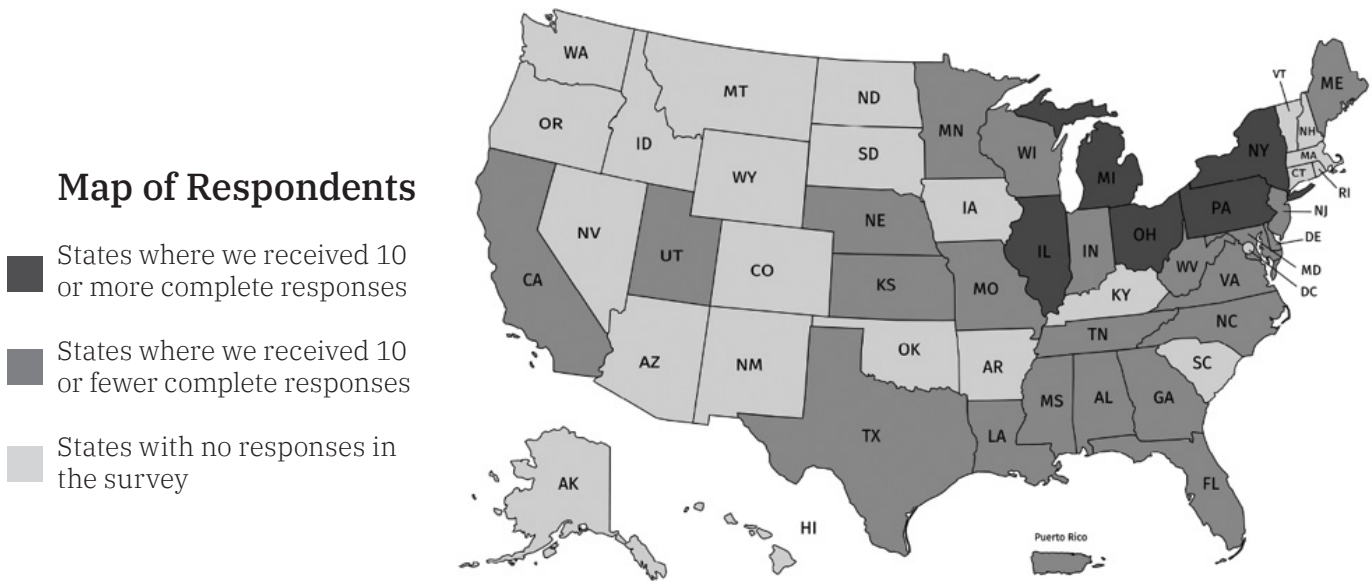
Despite the hypothesized expanding benefits of engagement across the continuum, few researchers have exam-

ined how organizations are engaging residents in vacant lot greening and how these practices affect their programs. Recognizing the value of community-engaged greening of vacant lots for improving public health and community safety, the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center at the University of Michigan’s School of Public Health partnered with the Center for Community Progress (Community Progress) to conduct a national study of greening and land management organizations. Through the study, we explored the factors that helped these organizations advance the capacity and sustainability of the greening work while ensuring that communities benefitted. Since resident engagement emerged as the top facilitating factor, we explored how these organizations are currently engaging communities in their work and how their engagement practices support their programs. This article highlights many of the findings of this new line of research and poses questions for how resident engagement can advance future efforts to green vacant lots across the United States.

**About the Study**

We conducted a two-phase implementation study to examine the factors necessary for greening programs to expand community benefits and increase program capacity and sustainability. The first phase of the implementation study included in-depth interviews with stakeholders at established greening programs and their partner networks in three cities experiencing high levels of abandonment and vacancy: Flint, Michigan, Youngstown, Ohio, and Camden, New Jersey. Semi-structured interview questions focused on the resources and capacity required to take greening

**Figure 2.** National Survey on Greening Respondent Map



programs to scale and ensure their optimal functioning. We conducted 11 interviews that were 45 minutes to 1 hour in length in Flint (4 interviews), Youngstown (4 interviews), and Camden (3 interviews). Interview participants included program managers, city officials, foundation leaders, land bank executives, and other stakeholders who support greening programs.

For the second phase of our implementation study, we partnered with Community Progress to conduct a national survey of greening and land management organizations. Organizations were eligible to participate if they owned an inventory of vacant property or were involved in maintaining or greening vacant property. Organizations were recruited through a listserv maintained by Community Progress that included land bank authorities, government agencies, nonprofits (that is, 501c3), community organizations (for example, block groups and neighborhood associations), redevelopment authorities, and other organizations that had previously participated in Community Progress programming.

The survey questionnaire included closed- and open-ended questions to assess organizational capacity, including the types of partners they worked with, the types of activities they conducted to improve vacant lots, their sources of funding, and the methods they used to engage residents in their work. Respondents completed short-answer questions to share the top three practices that facilitate their success, the top three things they need to scale up their greening work, and the advice they would give to other organizations interested in

increasing their greening capacity. Our final sample included 119 organizations from 27 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico (see Figure 2).

**Data analysis**

Interviews and short-answer responses (Qualitative) All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Short-answer responses from the national survey were extracted and analyzed along with the interview transcripts. We applied open coding to establish a set of codes to describe key components of greening programs. We identified barrier and facilitator codes to apply to instances when these components either supported or impeded greening program outcomes, including community benefit, capacity, and sustainability. Two coders independently applied codes to interview transcripts and short-answer responses from the national survey. Discrepancies in coding decisions were resolved through consensus discussion with a third coder. Our thematic analysis examined the relationships between resident engagement practices along the continuum of engagement (for example, communication, input, and involvement) and dimensions of community benefit and program capacity and sustainability, including the degree to which residents buy into and champion the work.

**National survey data (Quantitative)**

We used national survey responses to examine the ways in which organizations are engaging residents in their work. We also explored how resident engagement practices across the continuum affect organizational capacity and sustainability. Resident engagement measures were

based on the resident engagement continuum and included the number of activities undertaken by an organization to communicate with residents (for example, informal discussions and presentations), gather input from residents (for example, focus groups and surveys), involve residents in program planning (for example, serving on advisory groups and serving on the board), and involve residents in implementing greening activities (for example, design selection and ongoing maintenance).

We created an index of organizational capacity and sustainability composed of three dimensions: partnership network diversity and support, breadth of programs, and diversified revenue. We chose these dimensions because greening and land management organizations depend on diverse partner networks to obtain resources and create financial efficiencies (O’Keefe et al., 2020; Peterson and Zimmerman, 2004). Since each vacant lot is unique, the ability to conduct more types of activities to improve vacant lots (for example, gardens, parks, and green infrastructure) may support organizations in reclaiming more lots in ways that are responsive to community priorities (Kim, Miller, and Nowak, 2018; Schilling and Logan, 2008). Maintaining a diverse revenue stream is an important strategy for organizational sustainability because it can promote financial stability and protect against financial distress (Berrett and Holliday, 2018; Froelich, 1999; Frumkin and Keating, 2011; Tuckman and Chang, 2016). The organizational capacity and sustainability index was therefore calculated as the sum score of the total number of different types of organizations the responding organization had partnered with in the past year, the number of types of resources they had received from partners, the number of different types of activities they conducted to improve vacant lots, and the number of revenue streams they had that accounted for at least 10 percent of their organizational budget. Using a series of linear regression models, we tested how each subsequent form of resident engagement along the continuum influenced our index of organizational capacity and sustainability.

## Key Findings

### Finding 1: Resident engagement is critical

Resident engagement was the most mentioned and most widely endorsed facilitating factor for greening programs across the two implementation studies. In qualitative interviews, 100 percent of participants mentioned resident engagement as a factor facilitating community benefit, capacity, or sustainability. Resident engagement was also the most mentioned facilitating factor in the national survey, with over half of respondents reporting it as one of their top three practices for success. Reports that resident engagement was critical to program success were unprompted and endorsed by practitioners across

the country. The value of resident engagement was also triangulated by our quantitative survey results, which indicated its positive association with program capacity and sustainability.

### Finding 2: Benefits expand as depth of engagement increases

Qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that different resident engagement practices along the continuum may have distinct benefits for greening programs. Engaging residents at lower levels, including communication and input, was associated with enhanced program responsiveness to community priorities and increased community buy-in. As engagement progressed to higher-level involvement, organizations reported increased community control and expanded capacity and sustainability, in the form of greater resident investment in and sustained stewardship of greening. Below, we describe how resident engagement practices across the lower and higher ends of the resident engagement continuum advance (a) community benefits and (b) program capacity and sustainability.

#### Community benefits

Qualitative findings from the interview study and national survey indicate that resident engagement practices, including soliciting input and involving residents in the greening work, may be key to respecting residents, increasing community control, and building more responsive greening programs that directly benefit communities.

Gathering input helped organizations to understand residents’ interests, priorities, and concerns before taking any action. This practice was fundamental to respecting residents’ right to shape the greening that affects their immediate environment.

“We go to the community members and ask them what would you like to have done? [Not doing this] is just like going into somebody’s house and going straight to the refrigerator without asking.”

“I’m not going into a neighborhood without first talking to the community organization. If I’m doing something in your neighborhood, it’s in partnership with you.”

“[One of our top practices is] community organizing - we talk to neighbors adjacent to each property about the end use.”

Gathering residents’ input helped organizations identify community preferences about vacant lot greening and understand community needs and priorities.

“The advantages are that you end up with true, genuine community input. So a skateboard park, we had no idea that that’s what they were going to say they wanted.”

Soliciting residents’ input supported organizations in tailoring programs so they could better respond to residents’ needs and prioritize residents’ concerns to maximize community benefit.

“[Resident input] is a positive because you actually know within that neighborhood what is important to the residents. They are the issues that you try to address first to bring up their quality of life and to stabilize their neighborhood.”

“And so you can actually meet those needs when it might be something that you hadn’t thought about before.” (See image 3.)

Once organizations identified residents’ concerns and priorities, honoring these wishes was paramount for building trust and ensuring that greening and revitalization efforts reflected the community’s interests and vision.

“It’s a respect thing that we need to make sure that residents know that their opinion is what matters to us. If they don’t want it to be stabilized, if they want it to be left alone, then we’ll leave it alone.”

“[One of our top practices for success is] building community trust by showing up, listening, and ensuring designs are community-led and community-implemented.”

While residents’ input is beneficial for improving program responsiveness and meeting community needs, relying on input alone has potential pitfalls. For example, organizations may choose not to prioritize input or to use the process of consulting residents to rubber stamp initiatives without true resident buy-in (Arnstein, 1969; White, 1996). According to our participants, involving residents more closely in the work through formal staff and leadership roles is vital to ensuring that vacant lot greening efforts remain in alignment with residents’ priorities, allowing for expanded community benefit.

“[One of our top practices is to] have community members and leaders represented in the organization’s work groups and leadership roles.”

“When engaging with community, it helps to have staff who are not only knowledgeable about the

community but also representative of the community and able to identify with the lived experiences of community members.”

Letting go of control and deferring to the community were other strategies cited as methods to ensure that the work addresses residents’ concerns and furthers residents’ ownership of greening.

“This is a different kind of work that requires deference to community. It involves more give and take and letting go of control of the work.”

“Seek to empower residents and neighborhood groups to take control over their communities. Ultimately, residents go home to their neighborhoods every day and should be the primary point of reference for building a vision for their neighborhood.”

### ***Capacity and sustainability***

Resident engagement practices were also associated with a key dimension of capacity and sustainability: increased community buy-in and community stewardship.

Organizations reported that engaging residents early in the planning process, including communicating with residents and gathering their input, were important practices for ensuring that programs were acceptable to community residents.

“We listen first, and then act on a project. Although there is never universal consensus on a city project, this helps to ensure buy-in from the bottom-up.”

“Plan early and often. Our annual plan was produced with input from a community advisory group, which helped get buy-in from stakeholders early in the process.”

Communicating and gathering input helped organizations align their programs with residents’ interests and priorities. Without this step, respondents reported that residents would be likely to reject programs in the short or long term:

“Make sure to follow the lead of neighbors. If they don’t feel like it’s a priority, then it probably won’t be sustained.”

While gathering input was associated with foundational buy-in, organizations that involved residents in greening reported deepening resident commitment to the greening efforts.



“We aim to engage residents in the revitalization of their neighborhoods. Through our programs, outreach, workshops, and trainings, we foster a renewed sense of ownership [of the greening efforts] and community among residents.”

Residents who were involved in the work not only accepted it but also came to champion it by ensuring ongoing quality and capacity as stewards.

“It’s advantageous to involve community members in improving conditions which affect quality of life; because the community groups’ work directly affects their neighborhoods, we have not had quality control issues.”

“The resources that residents provide and just that they take ownership of the project and have eyes on the lots, I think that makes a huge difference.”

Although building relationships with and involving residents was more time-intensive, organizations reported that this investment improved the sustainability of their programs.

“It’s a more time-consuming approach in that you’re developing relationships with people who are helping make the stabilization possible, but at the same time, your results will hopefully last longer and take less effort on your part to keep them that way.”

“I really feel like if our program disappeared tomorrow that the lots would still look better than they did before we started the program. I know there would be some variation in quality, but it wouldn’t go back to where it was before because people just wouldn’t allow that.” (See images 4 and 5.)

We also examined the relationship between resident engagement practices and capacity and sustainability using quantitative data from our national survey. We found that the more organizations involved residents in planning and implementing the greening work, the higher they scored in terms of their organizational capacity and sustainability index. These findings held true after accounting for potential alternative explanations, including organization type, organizational budget, number of staff and volunteers, and length of time since initiating the greening program. These findings suggest that organizations that involve residents in program planning and greening implementation are more likely to enjoy a diverse partner network, obtain more resources from partners, perform more different types of activities to improve vacant lots, and obtain more diversified fund-

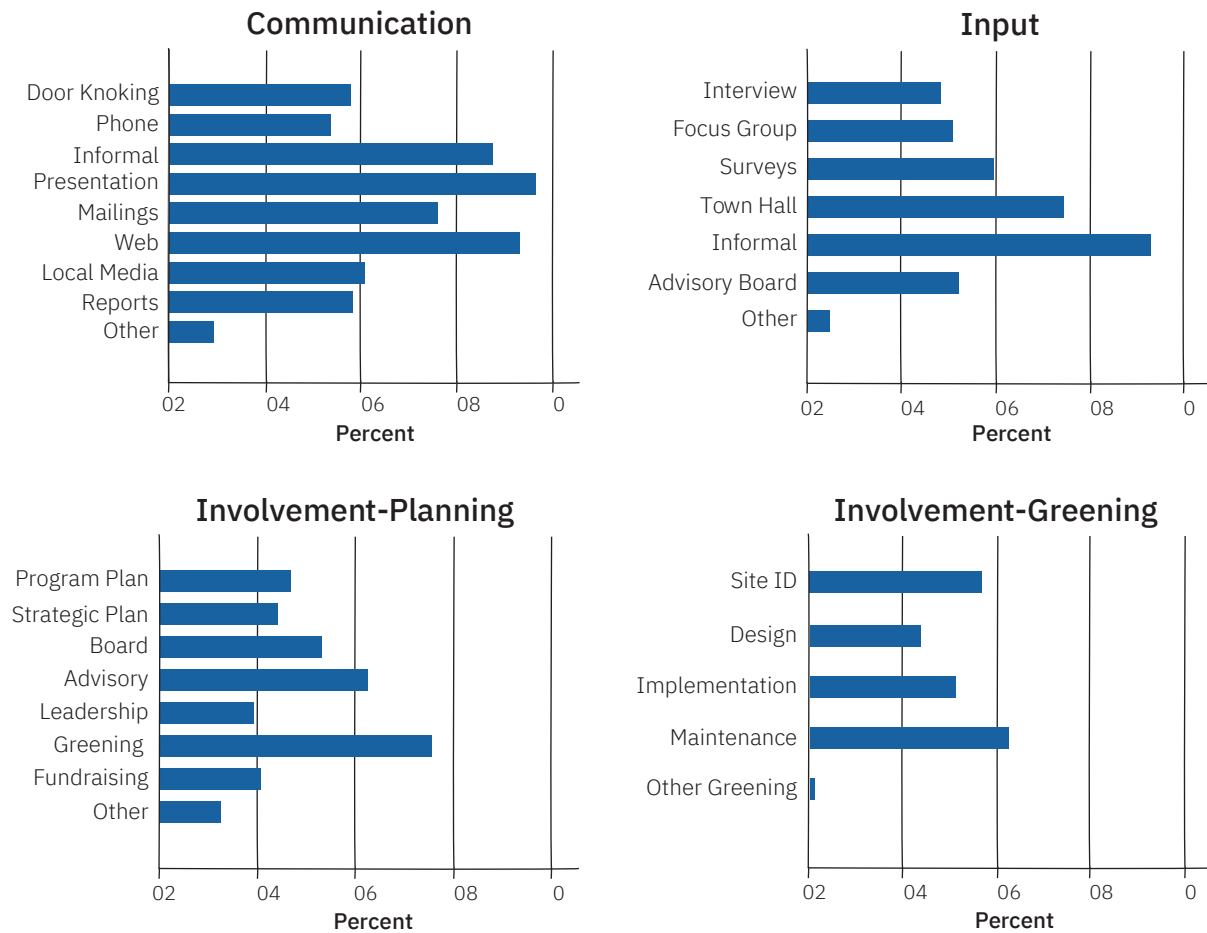
ing sources overall. Organizations with more diverse partner networks can leverage shared capacity and operate more efficiently and cost-effectively (O’Keefe et al., 2020). Organizations that conduct more improvement activities, such as green infrastructure, parks, and energy, may be better able to address more lots in ways that respond to community needs (Kim, Miller, and Nowak, 2018; Schilling and Logan, 2008). Diversified funding may help organizations weather financial uncertainty, including the loss of a revenue stream.

Resident involvement may support these dimensions of capacity and sustainability by catalyzing multiple benefits across the greening system. Residents who are actively involved may help organizations identify new partnerships through residents’ networks and shared connections to advance their work. Broader networks can increase access to funders that can contribute resources to expand program offerings (Glickman and Servon, 1998). Involving residents may support organizations in tapping into local motives for reclaiming vacant land (for example, access to food, storm water infrastructure, creative arts, and placemaking), allowing more lots to be reclaimed in alignment with community priorities (Schilling and Logan, 2008). Residents who are actively involved may be more likely to participate in volunteer programs, donate time and money, and take on new roles within their community. Involving residents can deepen their knowledge of an organization’s needs and priorities, which can support them in advocating on behalf of the organization (Neshkova and Guo, 2012; Glickman and Servon, 1998). Organizations that demonstrate robust resident engagement can better advocate for their priorities to funders and policymakers because they can more credibly represent the interests and priorities of their communities (Glickman and Servon, 1998). Increasingly, funders such as community foundations require evidence of resident engagement before investing in neighborhood improvement initiatives (Gilothe, 2018; Denver Foundation, 2020). Actively involving residents may increase eligibility for and access to funding sources that help organizations expand and diversify their portfolios. Collectively, these findings suggest that resident engagement may support a more responsive, diversified, and capable system of greening.

### **Finding 3: Resource constraints limit engagement to lower-level activities**

Despite the benefits of more intensive engagement, we found that it was more common for greening and land management organizations to engage residents at lower levels of the engagement continuum rather than at higher levels. The majority of organizations communicated with residents through mailings or e-newsletters (85 percent), informal face-to-face communication

**Figure 3.** Percent of Organizations Reporting Use of Resident Engagement Practices



(77 percent), presentations (75 percent), or website and social media (74 percent). It was also common for organizations to solicit input from residents, although this primarily occurred through informal discussions (78 percent), as opposed to more structured methods like surveys (35 percent) and focus groups (27 percent). It was much less common overall for organizations to involve residents in their work. A little more than half of organizations involved residents in performing greening work (55 percent), about a third involved residents in strategic planning, and only about a fifth (21 percent) involved residents in leadership roles on their staff or board (see Figure 3).

Overall, engagement that reached wide audiences through informal channels and that required less resident collaboration in implementation and decision-making was most common.

Organizations cited expanded resident involvement in their work as among their top needs to increase program capacity and meet rising demand for vacant lot

greening. These same organizations reported that a lack of dedicated staff time (74 percent) and reliable funding (60 percent) were their most significant barriers to expanding residents' involvement in greening activities. For more detailed findings from these studies, visit: <https://www.communityprogress.net/vacantland>.

**Conclusion**

As inventories of vacant lots expand across the country, we have a unique opportunity to convert the potential of vacant lots for the benefit of communities, including public health and safety. In our current context of rising inventories and limited resources, communities need strategies that increase their capacity to green vacant lots while ensuring long-term community benefits. The expanded participation of residents is critical to achieving these goals.

Results from two implementation studies indicate that resident engagement may be vital to strengthening the system of greening, so that it can deliver diverse benefits that are responsive to community priorities. While

all forms of engagement have some associated benefits, engagement that expands involvement and community control of greening offers unique rewards because the revitalization is driven by community priorities and taps into the talents and capacity of communities. Resident involvement may benefit organizations by increasing their own networks of committed volunteers and stewards who can assist in advocating for and completing the work. Neighborhoods benefit from an increased number of residents who are actively paying attention to the physical condition of the community and are more likely to report issues to the relevant public authorities. Resident-engaged greening can increase social connections within neighborhoods, build awareness of community conditions that affect quality of life, and foster community stewardship that strengthens greening programs. The positive changes catalyzed by resident-engaged greening support the upward spiral of neighborhood improvement described by the “busy streets” theory (Aiyer et al., 2015) and offer a counterpoint to cyclical neighborhood disinvestment and decline (Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003; Wilson, 1982).

Our findings also reveal that organizations across the United States are struggling to engage residents through more intensive involvement because of a lack of dedicated funding and staffing. Critically, resident engagement in greening is not free for organizations or community residents. Expanded resident involvement requires time, resources, and strategic management (Moynihan, 2016; O’Keefe et al., 2020). This type of engagement also has potential pitfalls, such as overburdening residents who may already experience time and resource constraints (Lowe and Thaden, 2016). Residents deserve compensation and support for their efforts to green neighborhoods and respond to systemic failures.

With greater investment and support for sustained resident involvement, greening programs could revitalize more land and better serve communities. While resident engagement has costs, it can be a worthwhile investment because of its potentially wide-reaching and reinforcing benefits for greening systems. Investing in residents’ work and furthering their commitment with dedicated financial support are not just the right thing to do; they offer a practical path forward, as we seek more systemic solutions to vacancy.

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## About the Center for Community Progress

The mission of Center for Community Progress is to foster strong, equitable communities where vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties are transformed into assets for neighbors and neighborhoods. Founded in 2010, Community Progress is the leading national, nonprofit resource for urban, suburban, and rural communities seeking to address the full cycle of property revitalization. The organization fulfills its mission by nurturing strong leadership and supporting systemic reforms. Community Progress works to ensure that public, private, and community leaders have the knowledge and capacity to create and sustain change. It also works to ensure that all communities have the policies, tools, and

resources they need to support the effective, equitable reuse of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties.

## About the Federal Reserve System

The Federal Reserve System (the Fed) is made up of 12 Reserve Banks that, together with the Board of Governors in Washington, DC, serves as the central bank of the United States. As the US central bank, the Federal Reserve conducts monetary policy, promotes financial stability, provides payment services to financial institutions, supervises banks, and promotes community and economic development.

## About the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta sits in the Federal Reserve's Sixth District and covers all of Georgia, Florida, and Alabama and portions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The Atlanta Fed's Community and Economic Development Department supports the Federal Reserve's mandate of stable prices and maximum employment by working to improve the economic mobility and resilience of people and places for a healthy economy. To do this, we conduct research and create data tools to uncover the barriers to and opportunities for improved economic mobility as well as to make the data easily accessible for community and organization planning and decision-making. We engage stakeholders to help organizations and communities understand relevant issues and undertake cross-sector solutions. And we track and elevate issues facing the lower-income resident of the Southeast.

## About the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland

The Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, the Federal Reserve's Fourth District, covers all of Ohio, western Pennsylvania, eastern Kentucky, and the northern panhandle of West Virginia. The Cleveland Fed's community development team promotes the economic resilience and mobility of low- and moderate-income people and communities throughout the Fourth District. We conduct research and engage with stakeholders on issues affecting access to credit, quality jobs, education, small business, and housing with the goal of increasing economic opportunity and helping people and communities thrive.





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